



# FOOD WASTE



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How  
**SMALL STEPS**  
can have a  
**BIG IMPACT**  
on reducing  
waste and  
**PROTECTING  
THE PLANET**

- 01. Menu Redesign Concepts
- 02. Donation Guidance
- 03. Customer Messaging
- 04. Procurement Best Practices
- 05. Employee Engagement
- 06. Diversion Resources**
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NATIONAL  
**RESTAURANT**  
ASSOCIATION



## FIGHTING FOOD WASTE IN RESTAURANTS

## DIVERSION RESOURCES

**If food can't be repurposed in-house or recovered for donation, your restaurant should make every effort to keep it out of the landfill.** When food rots in landfills, it produces potent greenhouse-gas emissions, contributing to our climate problem. If excess food can be repurposed as animal feed, or composted back into soil, we are creating a more circular and healthy system in which valuable nutrients go back into the food cycle. This helps produce more food, preserve resources, decrease emissions and waste, and feed more people.

A combined effort with





How  
**SMALL STEPS**  
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CREATE  
YOUR OWN  
DIVERSION  
PROGRAM



## 1. UNDERSTAND LOCAL REGULATIONS

Options to divert food waste from landfills differ from state to state depending on policy, infrastructure, and capacity. Some options include commercial hauling for compost or anaerobic digestion, or repurposing food scraps for animal feed. Contact your local waste hauler or state or local environmental office for details and advice on local options to divert food waste from landfills. Also, look at [FindAComposter.com](https://www.findacomposter.com) to discover local businesses to assist with these efforts.

Several states have articulated [food waste regulations](#) and goals to reduce food waste sent to landfills. A growing number of states are taking this legislation a step further and structuring their laws to ban organic waste in landfills.

## 2. EXPLORE OPTIONS AND IMPLEMENT SOLUTIONS

Explore options for on- and off-site management of food waste in your area. For example:

- **Look into on-site tracking technologies such as Leanpath and Winnow that help your business measure and manage your waste.** Tracking waste on the item-level helps determine key strategies for reduction and shows the impact of prevention on waste generation over time.
- **Find a local partner to whom you can send food scraps to be used in animal feed.** It's estimated that feeding food waste to pigs saves 20 times more carbon than the next-best recycling method. However, there are regulations concerning this method, so please refer to [this guidance document](#) by the Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic on donating food scraps as animal feed.
- **Find industrial uses for your waste by:**
  1. finding an [anaerobic-digestion facility](#) to convert waste to methane to power electricity.
  2. converting fats, oils, and greases (FOGs) to biofuel. According to National Restaurant Association research, 74% of restaurants recycle FOGs.





## How **SMALL STEPS** can have a **BIG IMPACT** on reducing waste and **PROTECTING THE PLANET**

### CREATE YOUR OWN DIVERSION PROGRAM

(continued)



- **Contract with an organic-waste hauler to regularly pick up wasted food and haul it to a commercial compost or anaerobic-digestion facility.**

Make sure the hauler cleans the organic waste bins before returning them to mitigate odors. Discuss what materials are accepted at the facility (e.g., bones? napkins? fruits and vegetables only?) because different types of facilities accept different materials. While contracting with an organic-waste hauler may introduce a new operational cost, you might see a decrease in your regular hauling fees and can renegotiate your trash pickup service. Over time, the exercise of separating out organic waste and analyzing reports from the hauler will offer insight into key drivers of waste at your establishment. This insight exposes solutions for reducing food waste that could save costs in procurement, staff time, and waste hauling.

- **Set up on-site composting or digestion, if space and facilities allow.** A compost pile or certain in-unit dehydrators and digesters create a fertilizer that can be distributed or sold to the community for use in landscaping, gardening, or local agriculture. Be mindful of the space these solutions demand as well as strategies to manage odor and pest risks.

### 3. TRAIN STAFF AND EDUCATE CUSTOMERS



Once a hauler or other landfill-diversion solution has been designated, train employees who dispose of food how to prevent contamination in food waste bins. All staff should receive training, but especially those employees who

manage waste regularly, including any temporary and overnight support staff who oversee cleanup. This can take several weeks of reinforcement before operations run smoothly.

Additionally, you'll need to design clear and specific guidance for customers to show them how to separate their trash at the end of a meal if they bus their own tables. Posters showing pictures of the actual items used in your restaurant and into what bin these items should be placed are most effective as they remove any potential for confusion. Even the best signage isn't always enough; asking staff to remind customers of the restaurant's policy when they deliver the food can be another good touchpoint. The Foodservice Packaging Institute offers some [tips on bins](#).

### 4. COLLECT DATA



Collecting data on the food waste you divert will be essential to assessing progress against goals, understanding continued problem areas, and establishing new intervention solutions.

This data can contribute to a holistic understanding of your operations and identify areas for improvement. Data can be collected using the software technologies mentioned above (Leanpath, Winnow), by requesting specific reports from haulers, and even by having staff fill out simple charts with weights and observations.

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